Building a Business Case for an Employee Communications App

Don’t know where to start with your communications mobile project? Building a well thought-out business case to get executive and stakeholder buy-in is the most important step to your success. This how-to guide can quickly help you make the business case for your employee communications app initiative.

Internal communication (IC) is critical to the strategic direction and success of your organization. And the more effective your communications are, the more aligned, productive, and focused your workforce will be.

That’s why it’s crucial to leverage the latest modern technologies, a mobile employee communications app, to reach and engage all of your employees - closing the gap to reach those hard-to-access deskless employees, those in the field, on-the-go, or off site, like in hospitals, warehouses, or retail locations.

While you recognize the value of a mobile app for your employee communication needs, you may be unsure how to get started. With any new enterprise-wide technology introduction, building a well thought out business case and getting stakeholder buy-in early will be the most important step to your success.

This practical how-to guide walks you through the steps for building a business case. It’ll help you:

1. Focus your efforts in the right direction
2. Gather the right information for a business case
3. Gain crucial support from leadership and stakeholders
Identify the measurable benefits

Begin building your business case by identifying the many benefits a mobile app can bring to your internal communications. A few of the most important are:

- **One streamlined communications hub.** A mobile app helps you streamline communications and provides a centralized communication hub for employees to easily access all information in one place. Employees are able to read messages, alerts, and announcements at anytime and anywhere.

- **Reach a disconnected workforce.** An employee app is particularly useful for companies with disparate workforces by reaching them on their mobile devices no matter where they are. It gives all workers instant access to all communications as well as to common employee-related workflows and processes.

- **Better engagement with employees.** A mobile app ensures a two-way dialogue with its inherent capability for interacting with your communications. Employees will be more engaged because they can instantly interact with your communications by giving feedback, submitting ideas, providing confirmations, or asking questions.

- **Increased productivity.** Mobile apps can increase productivity within the workplace as much as 40%. This means that you can potentially save 40% of employees’ time and invest it in generating additional work and revenue.

~It’s vital to step back and take the time to perform objective research on your audience—to know your employees’ challenges and needs.~

Know your employees’ needs

The most critical component in building a business case for a mobile solution is fully understanding the communication needs of your users and the inefficiencies they are experiencing. One of the easiest traps to fall into is underestimating how much you truly know your employees. It’s vital to step back and take the time to perform objective research. Otherwise, you’ll create a mobile app that looks great, but in reality, has a lukewarm reception because you missed the mark on addressing your users’ daily work challenges.

Next, let’s dive into the ways you can determine their needs - who to involve and what questions to ask.
Who to involve?

1. **Leverage your network, find influential leaders.** We recommend you leverage your existing networks and communication structures within your organization as a starting point for gathering research. Find out who are the most influential and respected practitioners in your target audience, and take them out for a coffee or lunch. Ask them directly what they need to make their life easier and more engaging at the workplace.

2. **Find early adopters.** Once you find the influential leaders, offer them the ability to advance their career by placing them in the spotlight as an early adopter, a co-creator of your solution. By sharing your success with influential leaders, you gain a valuable ally.

3. **Hold focus groups and conduct surveys.** Now that you are armed with insights from well-respected insiders, you should:
   - Hold a focus group with a wider audience of employee advocates or advisory boards.
   - If time is limited, employ traditional feedback methods such as broader employee surveys. A survey can’t replace insightful dialogue, but it can validate that your assumptions are valid and will scale.

What to ask?

To ensure that you’ll have widespread adoption and an employee-centric app, first determine your project objectives and then ask questions to pinpoint employee needs and pain points. Get answers to these questions definitively for presenting them in your business case, and you’re on your way to a successful project.

**Here are some questions to help you form your mobile app objectives:**

- What needs will this app help address?
- What challenges will this app help solve?
- What does success look like?
- Will I be targeting a particular group of employees?
- What is my plan for maximizing adoption?
- How will I encourage leaders to actively use it?

**Here are sample questions to ask your employees about their current communication methods:**

- What forms of communication work best and why?
- Too many ways to get news & information?
- What communication channels can you not access?
- Are there ways for you to quickly and easily express your ideas, ask questions?
- Are you kept well informed about company mission, values, and strategy?
- Are you kept well informed by senior leaders on company plans and progress?

**Sample questions to ask employees about mobile:**

- Will getting information via a mobile app be easier for you and why?
- Will a mobile app help you finish tasks faster?
- What available tools, features, or tasks would make you want to use an employee mobile app?
- What would make the workplace more engaging?
Demonstrate the real ROI

If you have a clear calculation for the expected ROI, you are on the right track for getting approval for your project. Unfortunately, many don’t know how to clearly articulate the value their mobile solution will bring. Here are three main factors to include when compiling ROI:

1. Include broad industry benefits. Research peer industry websites, forums, and groups to find reports with statistics and survey results that speak to the benefits of employee communications and engagement via mobile technology.

2. Second, determine the precise benefits by answering the following questions for a number of real-world scenarios:
   - **What process are you trying to improve?** For example, increase the # of employees reached with news and updates.
   - **What is the desired impact of using this mobile app?** For example, with current channels, we can only reach 65% of our employees. It takes more than one week and three managers to reach employees in our retail stores with important company news and updates.
   - **What is the positive business outcome linked to this app?** For example, using an employee mobile app, we can distribute messages directly to smartphones, reducing the time from one week to instantaneous. The number of people involved is reduced to one person.

3. Third, beyond improving existing processes, consider the qualitative value of the new platform, such as:
   - Helping your executives see exactly how engaged their staff is with each post;
   - Getting instant participation and feedback from a virtual townhall meeting;
   - Having the ability to warn staff of a safety emergency and reduce injuries;
   - Turning each employee into a brand advocate.

By partnering with other functional areas and building in workflows that help your employees be more efficient, that’s a sure fire way to get viral adoption.

Collaborate with other groups

Partner with other business owners like Human Resources to understand their needs and build a business case as a united front.

There is no imaginary boundary between Internal Communications and other groups.

You might be thinking “Well, that’s great, but I work in Corporate Communications, not HR or Finance. I’m not building more into my communications app.” This is a genuine risk to your project’s success not to think from the employee’s perspective. To your staff, there is no imaginary boundary between Communications, HR, and Finance, they only see “the company.”

Reach out, join forces, and combine budgets.

We strongly encourage you to reach out to your colleagues in other business units and departments. It’s very likely you will find another like-minded partner who has performed similar research and is interested in teaming up. Further, in the best of scenarios, you’ll be able to combine budgets for a project that would have not been feasible if it was funded independently.

By partnering with other functional areas and building in workflows help your employees be more efficient throughout their day, that’s a sure fire way to get viral adoption and drive engagement with your messages in the same mobile app.
5 Determine the primary use cases

Now that you understand your employees’ needs, you can start thinking about the primary use cases that the app will address. At this stage in your project, you’ll only need to communicate the use cases at a high-level. After you gain approval to move forward, you’ll work with your mobile app vendor to dive deeper to identify the specific uses cases you need within your employee mobile app.

Combine mobile use cases that benefit all

When you ask employees about what they need, they’ll tell you that they want everything in one place, precisely when they need it, to get their job done faster and more efficiently. If you go the route of having your employee communications in a separate mobile app from other enterprise systems where work gets done, you are taking the risk of not having your message received. After all, we place posters and digital signage where workers can see it, right? Why would your mobile app be any different?

6 Make the right pitch

The next step for sharing your vision to others is to create an effective presentation to help you pitch your business case. Just like an enterprising founder of a Silicon Valley startup, you need to pitch your idea and gain favor at all levels within the organization that are going to invest in your success.

Create a compellingly simple presentation

Start by documenting the challenges your organization and employees are facing and how you aim to solve them with your new solution. Include specific ROI details, and the scope of use cases that will be in the app. Start small, and progressively build from there. With each briefing, you will refine your strategy, talking points, and pitch.

Bring your secret weapon, a prototype

Because employee mobile experiences are still relatively new, you’ll be more successful if you create a prototype of the app to show to your stakeholders. Seeing is believing. Nothing drives enthusiasm like having them download a mobile prototype right on their personal devices, login, and see their corporate branding and example use cases in real-time.

This is meant to be a “low or no cost” approach because you don’t yet have project funding. In most cases, the mobile vendor you choose can provide you with a high-fidelity prototype mobile app — your “secret weapon” when you need to engage your executives. Avoid vendors who can’t or won’t provide this service as it’s unlikely they have a mature, scalable product to offer.

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Internal communication use cases

- Company news, blogs & alerts
- Virtual townhalls & videos
- Community involvement
- Q&A, surveys & polls
- Recognition
- Idea sharing
- Expertise search
- Confirmations & receipts

HR & other efficiency use cases

- Leave request and approvals
- Time management
- Personal data updates
- Benefits enrollment & policy access
- Document lookup
- Training & instruction materials
- Policy & procedures
- Expense & PO management
- Inventory lookup
Next steps: Moving forward with your mobile app project

Once you’ve had success getting stakeholder buy-in, it’s time to move forward with your mobile employee communications project. The experts at Sitrion can help you with those next steps, from formulating your mobile strategy and scoping your use cases, to setting up a pilot with a small group of employees, then rolling out your employee communications app for maximum adoption.

Contact a Sitrion Sales Representative to discuss your mobile project:
www.sitrion.com/ContactUs

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- Time management
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